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Metaphors and Argumentation

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ABSTRACT: To describe how metaphors work from an argumentative point of view is the first step of this paper. After describing the metaphorical argumentative mechanism, the second step is to apply this mechanism by analyzing some paradigmatic international metaphors that are used in public speeches. This analysis will enable us to see some common grounds between different cultures and countries, especially regarding economical issues and argumentation theory.

KEYWORDS: argumentation, backing, cognitive linguistics, common grounds, Lakoff, conceptual metaphors, proverbs, Toulmin model.

1. INTRODUCTION

In Athens, there is a moving company called “Methaphorà”. It is a good strategy and smart metonymy to substitute and reduce the function of transferring that the company does everyday by means of the name. But, like the name of the company only represents the general function of transferring people and furniture from one place to another, the standard rhetorical approach to the term “metaphor” only describes and reduces this trope as “changing a word from its literal meaning to one not properly applicable but analogous to it” (Lanham 1991, p. 188).

This definition follows a very venerable tradition that probably started with Aristotle. In *Rhetoric*, talking about style, Aristotle considers that “it is from metaphor that we can best get hold of something fresh” (Book III, Chapter 3, 1410b), a comment that condemned the metaphor to be, for a long period, just a matter of imagination, poetry and *divertimento*. At the same time, Aristotle recognizes in this comment that the metaphor is a natural device of speech, ready to be used.

In the analysis of actual communication from an argumentative point of view, this angle was integrated by Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca (2000), but after them nothing else has been added, neither by Pragma-dialectics (van Eemeren and Grootendorst 1992, 2004; van Eemeren and Houtlosser 2002a, 2002b, 2002c) nor by other theoretical efforts (Ducrot et Anscombre 1983; Tindale 1999) that try to put together all important rhetorical and argumentative concepts and figures, even though thirty years ago from a cognitive science perspective, and especially from linguistics, an interesting proposal has emerged.

In fact, and in brief, this new approach claims that some common grounds and dissensus are structured on the basis of similar “frames” or “conceptual systems”, and the “frames” are the result of metaphors. These are some of the main conclusions that George Lakoff and his team have proposed to understand how people perceive, think and act in

the world by means of the natural languages (Lakoff 2006a, 2006b, 2004, 1994; Lakoff & Turner 1989; Lakoff & Johnson 1980; Kövecses 2002). From an applied cognitive science perspective, and after a long period of empirical research, both linguistic and social analysis, have suggested that common grounds between different cultures or groups are produced by similar metaphors. One of the core ideas of this angle is that fundamental values and points of view in a particular culture are systematically coherent with their metaphorical structures and their lexical frames.

A couple of examples can show the cognitive metaphorical approach to the problem of common grounds. One of the ways to conceive “society” and “nation”, in Western culture, no matter whether it is in Chile or in France, involves categories like “person” and “family”, such as in the following expressions: “neighboring countries”, “the founding fathers of the country”. These expressions are part of the daily repertory to talk about those abstract concepts. A similar situation for the understanding of political power, which is expressed as a physical force: “They forced the opposition out of the House”. We find clearer examples when we talk about “love”, “discussion”, “theory” in terms of “journey”, “war” and “building”:

Even though some aspects or points of departure of this approach could be a matter of discussion, such as the notable and substantial critics of Donald Davidson at a philosophical level (Davidson 1978), it is reasonable to consider some aspects of this proposal to find new ways to describe and explain our western cultural common grounds and dissensus.

Within the cognitive point of view on metaphor, the attention in this paper is especially focused on exploring what place the conceptual metaphor has in the elaboration of arguments.

2. METAPHORICAL MECHANISM

Metaphors like the following: “I don’t think this relationship is going anywhere”, or “Look how far we’ve come” (Kövecses 2002, p. 5), show that a personal relationship, which could involve ‘love’, is being understood as a ‘journey’, in which the latter concept exports its meaning to the first.

A summarized explanation of this phenomenon, from a cognitive linguistics point of view, is that human understanding is composed of a set of correspondences between a source domain and a target domain. In our example, the domain source is ‘journey’ (A) and the target is ‘personal relationship’ or ‘love’ (B). Constituent conceptual elements of B correspond to the constituent elements of A. The processes of correspondences between both domains are called ‘mappings’ in Lakoff and Johnson’s jargon (1980). Thus, a daily expression is a manifestation of a conceptual metaphor that involves two conceptual domains, but in which one domain is conceptualized in terms of the other.

It is important to add that for Lakoff and Johnson, and their followers, the point of departure is a philosophical level that they call ‘experiential’, which implies that the source domains are dimensions closer to the corporal experience and the target domains are more abstract, which means that, in general, the latter imports meaning from the first. For this reason ‘love’ is conceptualized as a ‘journey’. Because conceptual metaphors come from our interaction and come with the experience, of which both they are a product, such as orientational metaphors –happy is up, sad is down–, they also have

linguistic manifestations. Linguistic metaphors are linguistic manifestations of conceptual metaphors. Conceptual metaphors expose systematic mappings between the domains but at the same time are selective, that is to say, highlight some aspects of the experience and hide others. For example, the conceptual metaphor 'Rational is up': "The discussion fell to an emotional level". Kövecses (2002) explains the general picture with a precise overview:

On what basis do we select the source domains for particular targets? In the traditional view, the selection of sources assumes an objective, literal and preexisting similarity between the source and the target. By contrast, the cognitive view maintains that the selection of source domains depends on human factors that reflect nonobjective, nonliteral, and nonpreexisting similarities between a source and a target domain. These are called the experiential bases or motivation of conceptual metaphors. Some of the common kinds of such similarities include: (1) correlations in experience, (2) perceived structural similarity, (3) perceived structural similarity by basic metaphors, (4) source being the root of the target. (2002, p. 76).

The followers of this approach have developed many concepts, distinctions and classifications to explore all that their view on metaphors involves, which are not possible to detail, but some of them will be explained in the analysis of the cases further exposed, such as 'conventionalized metaphors' (Lakoff and Turner 1989), 'structural and ontological metaphors' (Lakoff and Johnson 1980), 'generic-level' (Lakoff and Turner 1989), among others.

Nevertheless, it is possible to pose a basic methodological mechanism in order to distinguish the process in which a mapping is working in a conceptual metaphor. The mechanism could be summarized in six steps, which are: a) to obtain linguistic expressions; b) naming the conceptual metaphor contained; c) distinguishing conceptual domains; d) describing situational logic of the source domain; e) characterizing aspects of the domain source; and, f) to put forward correspondences or mappings between the domains.

A recurrent example used to illustrate this mechanism comes from the following expressions (Lakoff and Johnson 1980; Kövecses 2002): "Your claims are indefensible", "He attacked every weak point in my argument", "His criticisms were right on target", "I have never won an argument with him". Mere intuition points out a basic relationship between the concepts that these expressions contain, which is "discussions and war". Thus, the conceptual metaphor is named as: "Discussions are war", where the domain source is "war" and the domain target is "discussions". The situational logic of the source domain demonstrate, among other relationships, that: The more time we attack, the more destruction; the better the weapons in the attack, the weaker the place that is attacked; a better strategy to attack and defend, a better result in time; more precision in attacking the target, the faster a war is won. The last step, and maybe the most important, is to understand how the conceptual metaphor is obtained, and to map the understanding between the domains: such as in a war the best result is obtained by a good strategy, so a discussion is won through a good strategy; such as in war victory is won by attacking the easiest target of the enemy, so in a discussion victory is won by addressing the weak arguments of the opponent.

The list of possible correspondences is continuous, but at least one remark and question emerge here: if we give credit to the cognitive linguistic approach to the

phenomenon of conceptual metaphor, what is its function or place in an argument? How could it be integrated into a theory of argumentation?

Some initial answers have been given by Lakoff (2004, 2006a), even though he is not an expert in argumentation or rhetoric theory, but his assumptions are plausible when he analyzes, for example, political arguments. He summarizes his perspective on “all effective and successful arguments” (2006a, p. 119) as follows:

They have moral premises, that is, they are about what is right; they use versions of contested values taken from a particular moral view; they have an implicit or explicit narrative structure, i. e., they all tell stories with heroes, villains, victims, common themes, etc.; they also serve as counterarguments: they undermine arguments on the other side; they have issue-defining frames that set up problem and the solution; they use commonplaces frames –frames known so widely that they resonate immediately, whether true or not; they use language with surface frames that evoke deeper frames. (Lakoff 2006a, p. 119)

By analyzing extracts of speech of one the most important current leaders of the Democrat Party in the USA, Senator Barack Obama of Illinois –who will run for the administration in the next American election-, Lakoff (2006a, pp. 120-124) applies these soft-theoretical considerations to emphasize that all good argument is based on the right frame for the specific context. But clearly Lakoff (2006a) illustrates this by commenting on the *Bad Apple Frame*, which is a frame that works in different cultural soups, as common ground:

Bad apple frame: Consider the saying “A bad apple spoils the barrel”. The implication is that if you remove the bad apple or some small number of bad apples, the others will be fine. The rot is localized and will not spread. Rot here is a metaphor for immorality. In a case where there is immoral behavior, it points blame at one person or a few people –and not to any broader systematic immorality, an immoral policy, or an immoral culture. This commonplace frame has been used to limit the inquiry into torture as a systematic problem in the military (as in the Abu Gharaib scandal), so the problem is contained. The army just got rid of the “bad apple” –the lowest-ranking military personnel involved. The same was true of Enron Corporation, where a few executives (Jeffrey Skilling and Kenneth Lay) were identified as bad apples, rather than the entire culture of Enron, where top-level and even midlevel employees commonly schemed to rip off the public by taking advantage of the deregulation of utilities with illegal actions like those code-named “Death Star” and “Get Shorty”. (Lakoff 2006a, p. 126)

Apart from the suggestive content-analyses in Lakoff’s account, still the frame-conceptual metaphor perspective seems to be unclear from an argumentative theoretical point of view, because technically it is not immediately given which place it could have in the, for instance, syllogistic chain.

Because metaphors work as a cultural and social consistency (Lakoff and Johnson 1980), actualized by mental procedures (Lakoff 2006a), I would like to suggest that, in terms of metaphorical mechanism described already, the conceptual metaphor could be conceived as ‘backing’ and at least one of the correspondences of the conceptual metaphor as ‘Warrant’, taking ‘backing’ and ‘warrant’ in Toulmin’s sense.

3. METAPHORS IN GLOBAL ECONOMY

As we all know, we share many metaphors in the global economy. For example, a very common one between Americans is “tax relief” (Lakoff 2004, pp. 3-34), which can also

be heard in Argentina, Chile, England, France, etc., wherever neo-liberalism is working. Another metaphor in global economy is “the metaphor of labor as a resource whose costs are to be minimized” (Lakoff 2006b, p. 157). Another one is “economic systems are buildings”, which is actualized in expressions like: “With its economy in ruins, it can’t afford to involve itself in military action (Kövecses 2002, p. 108).

A very good example to show the relationship between conceptual metaphor, frame and argumentation, is provided by a Chilean newspaper (El Mostrador, www.elmostrador.cl, March 28, 2001):

Lamarca: the economic prescription is obsolete. The president of the Sociedad de Fomento Fabril (Sofofa), Felipe Lamarca, called for the government to take new economic measures and to throw out the old prescription, “this pill doesn’t work and has to be changed”. The head of Sofofa emphasized that the low economic moment in which Chile finds itself does not differ much from the panorama offered immediately after the Asian crisis, where employment, poverty and minimal growth are the most serious issues that preoccupy the country. Chile contracted an oriental flu and the medicine that the doctor prescribed has not allowed the country to recuperate. “The doctor came and since then I’ve been feeling worse every day. Please change the treatment because it’s being applied in the wrong way”, sustained Lamarca with irony. Without suggesting a specific alternative, like he already said “I can not argue with the doctor because he’s the only one we have at present and I don’t want to blame anyone nor fight with anybody”, the president offered the government his collaboration in finding a new formula to permit the economy to get out of the rut in which it finds itself. “This pill doesn’t work and has to be changed”, the leader of the industrials said and added that the government should call for all the specialists and leave personal interests aside, because if the prescription isn’t changed, the deterioration will become worse which will show in the country’s growth and employment. “We should unite the government and the businesses in order to find a new prescription that makes us grow slowly, but makes us grow more”, the president of Sofofa affirmed. “We have to have faith; we want to collaborate on the change of the prescription”. With respects to the measures that should be taken, Lamarca sustained that “we know what we have to do, we know which measures are pro employment, pro growth, and the authorities shouldn’t shut themselves out because we have to do whatever is necessary”.

A first comment that I could pose is that, in general, the conceptual metaphor is a procedure to infer particular truths from principles accepted in particular cultural environments, which is, I think, an idea very close to Toulmin’s concepts of ‘backing’ and ‘warrant’, because, as Tindale points out, “Different fields of argument will employ different standards of assessment as warrants, data, and backing come into play in different ways” (Tindale 1999, p. 25). On the other hand, one should not forget that from Lakoff’s perspective the truth is experiential, a matter of interaction, such as Toulmin’s jurisprudential model of argument claims that conclusions are field-dependent (Toulmin 1958; Toulmin, Rieke and Janik 1978).

In the example above, it is possible to see at least two conceptual metaphors working in the argument, which I think are part of the common grounds of western countries: “the economy is an organism”, and “the administration is a doctor”. For the first one, we found expressions in the quoted speech like: “The economic prescription is obsolete”; “Chile contracted an oriental flu”; “The pill doesn’t work and has to be changed”; “We should unite the government and the businesses in order to find a new prescription that makes us grow slowly, but makes us grow more”. For the second conceptual metaphor, we can find expressions like: “the medicine that the doctor prescribed has not allowed the country to recuperate”; “The doctor came and since then I’ve been feeling worse every day. Please change the treatment because it’s being applied

in the wrong way”; “I can not argue with the doctor because he’s the only one we have at present”.

For the first conceptual metaphor the following correspondences can be exposed: such as an organism can contract all kinds of illnesses, so the economy can suffer all kinds of problems; such as an organism needs the right food to stay healthy, so the economy needs the right politics to grow; such as a good treatment-prescription can cure a sick organism, so good economical politics can resolve troubles of growth. For the second one: such as a doctor prescribes medicine, so the political administration applies solutions; such as the recovering of an illness depends on the doctor’s treatment, so the economy depends on the administration’s policies.

In terms of Toulmin’s jurisprudential model, we can demonstrate the working of the argument as follows:

<p>Backings:</p> <p>Conceptual Metaphors: the economy is an organism the administration is a doctor</p>	
1. Argument in terms of source domain:	2. Argument in terms of target domain:
Warrant: medical treatments-prescriptions can cure illness	Warrant: the administration’s policies can resolve economical troubles
Data 1: our organism is sick	Data 1: our economy is in trouble
Data 2: the doctor has applied a treatment-prescription	Data 2: the administration has applied a specific policy
Data 3: the treatment-prescription hasn’t been effective	Data 3: the specific policy hasn’t been effective
Conclusion: Then, we have to change the treatment-prescription	Conclusion: Then, we have to change the economical policy

This argumentative mapping is based on the conceptual metaphors implied: “the economy is an organism”, and “the administration is a doctor”. It is very interesting to note that these conceptual metaphors are very rooted in the global economical discussion.

Following Lakoff and Johnson’s angle (1980), these two metaphors can be taken as conventionalized metaphors, and these kinds of “metaphors are deeply entrenched and hence well known and widely used in a speech community” (Kövecses 2002, p. 248). In fact, this ‘wide use’ can be seen as a case of structural metaphor. The cognitive function of the structural metaphor is to understand a sort of target domain as a specific source domain; in economics, it is very usual to see the economy as an organism.

According to Fillmore (1982), and Lakoff (1994), given a certain frame –a certain activated conceptual metaphor-, the mechanism of generative semantic importing-exporting of meaning between the domains involved will always mark the comprehension of a concept, such as our example shows. From rhetorical considerations, the speaker will highlight certain aspects that the frame of conceptual metaphor contains, and his choices can show the recurrent types of social backings-frames of which he is part.

4. METAPHORS IN ARGUMENTATION THEORY

Idioms, proverbs and sayings have been exhaustively studied in cognitive linguistics (Gibbs 1990; Gibbs and O'Brien 1990; Kövecses and Szabó 1996; Lakoff and Turner 1989), but also from a rhetorical point of view (Mieder 2005), and from the argumentative angle as well (Goodwin and Wenzel 1979; Santibáñez 2007).

Like Lakoff's example of "A bad apple spoils the barrel" showed from where the frame "bad apple" comes from, idioms, sayings and proverbs put in scene the conceptual metaphor "generic is specific". Lakoff and Turner (1989) dedicate a special chapter to proverbs. By explaining that they "evoke schemes rich in images and information" (p. 162), but that they especially give details and concrete images at the same time, Lakoff and Turner, relating poetry and proverbs, claim that:

There is a general answer to these questions for all poetry with the characteristics of this proverb [Blind/blames the ditch]. There exists a single generic-level metaphor, GENERIC IS SPECIFIC, which maps a single specific-level schema onto an indefinitely large number of parallel specific-level schemas that all have the same generic-level structure as the source-domain schema (Lakoff and Turner 1989, p. 162)

I will apply and explain more about this by analyzing the following case. The title of the paper with which Scott Jacobs and Sally Jackson participated in the Festschrift for Frans van Eemeren, was: 'Derailments of argumentation: It takes two to tango' (Jacobs and Jackson 2006, p. 121).

"It takes two to tango", according to Mieder (2005, p. 13) is a very American proverb, which has been exported to other cultures, regions and countries with the same meaning and application. It is a really good representation of folk wisdom. The mapping of "generic is specific" that this proverb has, is defined by:

... the constraint that governs all generic-level metaphors, namely, that it preserve the generic-level structure of the target domain, except for what the metaphor exists explicitly to change, and import as much generic-level structure of the source domain as is consistent with that first constraint (Lakoff and Turner 1989, p. 163).

The scheme that this proverb contains as generic-level information, could be characterized, at least, by the following elements:

- There is a dance called Tango.
- This dance can not be danced by one person alone.
- If someone tries to dance the Tango alone, it will not actually be the Tango.
- To dance this dance two people are needed.

This information constitutes a generic-level scheme, represents the source domain, and could be transferred to other concepts and specific-level schema:

- There is a problem-issue called fallacy.
- This problem can not be explained by a concept which considers one side alone.

- If someone tries to explain the problem of fallacy with this concept, it is not going to be the right explanation in fact.
- To explain the problem one needs to consider the two parts involved in a fallacious situation.

Of course, the authors not only use the proverb to explain their position, but face and discuss the issue with other arguments and examples as well, and part of the main arguments can be found in the next passage:

Whether viewed as a wrongly applied argumentation scheme or as a move that is a functional violation of a discussion rule, we doubt the possibility, and even the desirability, of classifying an individual argument (or other move) as fallacious or not outside of its context of occurrence. Embedding all arguments –strong, weak, and fallacious– in discursive engagements, we are much more interested in the interplay of move and countermove than in extracting one party’s contribution alone and inspecting it for fallaciousness. When arguments seem fallacious to a participant, it is that participant’s responsibility to initiate repair (or to withhold or adjust those arguments in the first place). Where bad moves may slip by, what is needed are procedures that manage their occurrence in a constructive way. In this respect, our position is slightly more socialized than that of Pragma-Dialectics. We would willingly abandon the idea of a fallacy as a defective argument or illegitimate move in favor of analytic constructs capable of capturing what has gone wrong in the flow of debate. Move and countermove are equally implicated in anything that goes wrong; together they make up flow. Derailment always occurs in at least two steps. A bad move of some sort is made and then, rather than taking corrective action of some sort, the move is allowed to pass and to take effect or, worse yet, the bid for derailment is taken up and pushed even further along... (Jacobs and Jackson 2006, p. 124).

In this extract, we can see how the proverb imposes an argumentative line and, at the same time, how the extended argument is contained in the proverb. To place the proverb in the title is not only a rhetorical strategy, but also a clear argumentative instruction to understand the correct reading of the problem at hand that the authors propose. It is a good title, a very strategic one, because it evokes metaphorically a very graphic image through which the critique is more explicit, providing the final argument a particular strength. But, one should be careful to qualify an argument with ‘strength’ or not, because, as Freeman points out (2006, p. 25) “...‘strength’ and ‘weight’ are obviously metaphorical”.

5. CONCLUSION

To deepen our understanding of the phenomenon ‘metaphor’ in terms of a theory of argumentation, is in line with many other efforts in philosophy, rhetoric and cognitive linguistics. In fact, many of the most famous contemporary rhetoricians, philosophers and intellectuals have said something about it, such as, M. Beardsley, M. Black, W. Booth, K. Burke, D. Davidson, S. Freud, N. Goodman, I. Richards, P. Ricoeur, J. Searle, L. Wittgenstein, among many others.

The important history of the metaphor demands a serious effort to take the challenge of exploring the place of metaphor in syllogistic construction of arguments, because we can not continue understanding it only in rhetorical terms, especially given the evidence from a cognitive point of view. Metaphors are part of a larger conceptual framework, such as arguments and the activity of argumentation, but taken as conceptual

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metaphors they can be analyzed as general material or evidence to support arguments, that is, as backing; or as warrants when one of their correspondences allows us to see the move from a particular reason to the conclusion. In the case of the uses of proverbs, the metaphor implied is converted in a parallel inferential scheme to stress the route of a particular argument. More analysis will allow us to reject or approve these theoretical pretensions. This is a first step.

[link to commentary](#)

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